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We are much indebted to Professor Webster for bringing together this mass of material relating to rest days of various kinds, and the copious footnotes make reference to the original sources easy. To what extent he regards these different sorts as related is not clearly brought out by the author. Also in some places generalizations occur which are not proved and to which exception might readily be taken. On the whole, however, his position is perhaps best illustrated by his explanation of the widespread occurrence and similarity of tabooed days.

Within contiguous areas, for example, in Borneo and the adjoining islands, or among related peoples, such as the American and Asiatic Eskimo, it is reasonable to ascribe the uniformity of custom to long continued borrowing. . . . But where tabooed days are observed for the same reasons by unrelated peoples, who, as far as our knowledge reaches, have never been in cultural contact, the student is obliged to conclude that the beliefs underlying the custom in question have not been narrowly limited but belong to the general stock of primitive ideas. In such cases the doctrine of the fundamental unity of the human mind seems alone to be capable of explaining the astonishing similarity of its products at different times and in different parts of the world.

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BOOKS ON THE HISTORICITY OF JESUS

In two volumes¹ the indefatigable Mr. Robertson returns to the demonstration that Jesus is a myth. The first of the two is an attempt to survey the positions of various writers who believe Jesus to be a historical figure, and to show them hopelessly wrong, both in their positive assumptions and in their objections to the myth theory. The second, though it has some controversial element, is in the main a presentation of Mr. Robertson's notion of how Christianity, with no Jesus and nothing corresponding to the gospel story, got started in the world. The whole is an impressive display of the extraordinary, futile ingenuity of which a gifted but unsound mind is capable. There is no reason why this sort of thing might not be written interminably, concerning any historic phenomenon whatsoever. What the author cannot see, though it must be plain to every reader, is that the infinitely involved and indirect procedure by which he represents the second-century church and its gospels to have come into being is a thousand times more incred-

¹ *The Historical Jesus*, 1916. xxiv+221 pages. 3s. 6d. *The Jesus Problem*, 1917. vii+264 pages. 5s. By John M. Robertson. London: Watts & Co.

ible than the simple hypothesis that Christianity, like Mohammedanism, had a founder, whose mission has left a written deposit in the gospels.

Mr. Robertson's favorite word is "inferribly"; without it his books could not be written. "Demonstrably" is an adverb whose use is denied him. The following situation is given him by his powers of inference:

There was at Jerusalem, at some time in the first century, a small group of Jesuist "apostles" among whom the chief may have been named James, John and Cephas. They *may* have been members of a ritual group of twelve, who may have styled themselves Brothers of the Lord; but that group in no way answered to the Twelve of the gospels. . . . The adherents believed in a non-historic Jesus, the "Servant" of the Jewish God, somehow evolved out of the remote Jesus-God who is reduced to human status in the Old Testament as Joshua. And their central secret rite consisted in a symbolic sacrament, evolved out of an ancient sacrament of human sacrifice. . . . This rite had within living memory, if not still at the time from which we start, been accompanied by an annual popular rite in which a selected person—probably a criminal released for the purpose—was treated as a temporary king, then derided, and then either in mock show or in actual fact executed, under the name of Jesus Barabbas, "the Son of the Father." Of this ancient cult there were inferribly many scattered centres outside of Judea (*Jesus Problem*, pp. 135 f.).

Such centres were found in Samaria, in Ephesus, and elsewhere in Asia Minor, probably at Alexandria and Antioch. The Jewish promoters of the cult proceeded "to develop the Savior-God of the sacramental rite (which they may at this stage have adopted in its 'pagan' form, now taken as canonical) into a Messiah who was to 'come again,' introducing the Jewish 'Kingdom of heaven'" (*Ibid.*, p. 203). On the other hand, "the chief Gentile achievement in the matter is the development of the primitive sacrament-motive and ritual (fundamentally dramatic) into the mystery-play which is transcribed in the closing chapters of Matthew and Mark. . . . The mystery-play in its complete form was inferribly developed and played in a Gentile city; and its transcription probably coincided with its cessation as a drama" (*Ibid.*, pp. 204 f.). The transcription furnished the nucleus of the Gospels, to which was added by accretion material from the Didaché and other sources, along with much symbolic and legendary story. So grew the Synoptics.

In all these writings "we are in a world of purposive fiction." There seems to have been a propagandist among the Gentiles named Paul, but "it is plainly unnecessary to assume in his case any abnormal

sincerity." The extant "Pauline epistles" are not his work; they "represent a polemic development, perhaps on the basis of a few short Paulines," and are second-century productions. The Acts "as a whole is plainly factitious . . . a blend of tradition and fiction, much manipulated during a long period." As for the parallel elements in the accounts of Peter and of Paul, "one or more may have wrought one narrative, and a later hand or hands may have systematically interpolated the other" (p. 143).

Mr. Robertson's most striking contribution to the discussion is perhaps his inferrible mystery-play, given by the Jesuits, "which may or may not have been definitely Jewish at the outset," but was certainly manipulated into its final form by gentile hands. In this play "the apostles in general are made to play a poor part; one plays an impossible rôle of betrayer; and the legendary Judaizing apostle is made to deny his Master" (p. 205). Incidentally there is an interesting suggestion as to a detail in the Fourth Gospel (13:29), "where 'the bag' is presumptively derived from a stage accessory in the mystery-drama, Judas carrying a bag to receive his reward" (p. 217). If the development of such a mystery-play with its implication of another God alongside Jahveh seems to us improbable among first-century Jews, we are told that Judaism was not at all the unified monotheism we customarily think it, and we are given eight considerations on the other side, beginning with "the essentially dramatic character of the Song of Solomon" (p. 74). To be sure, "we have no mention of the existence of a Jesus cult of any kind in the Hebrew books. But that is of necessity the case. The Sacred Books would naturally exclude all mention of a cult which in effect meant the continued deification of Joshua," who was inferribly a primitive god (p. 82). The cult and its propaganda were well known, some at least of its rites were public and popular, though the mystery-play was performed always in secret and is never anywhere mentioned, so that Mr. Robertson's knowledge of it is purely inferrible. The "silence of Josephus" concerning Jesus and the Christians "is an insurmountable negation of the gospel story" (p. 122); one may inquire why his silence concerning the Jesuits and their worship of a hero-god Jesus does not render their existence precarious.

We have no desire, however, to question Mr. Robertson. We have let him speak for himself. The more positive account of how the Christian religion began and the Gospels were written is of greater interest than the rather barren and often petty controversy with criticism in the earlier volume. The two together constitute an astounding act of

faith; for the mind that can honestly believe that the sublimest thing in human history was thus achieved we have only speechless incomprehension. It is as if some children playing in a studio during the artist's absence had left a canvas daubed over with—the Sistine Madonna. The painting of Raphael and the gospel of Jesus were inferribly otherwise given to the world.

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A REFORMER BEFORE THE REFORMATION¹

These two volumes constitute a valuable contribution to the resources available to the English reader for the twilight period of ecclesiastical history antedating the dawn of the Protestant Reformation. They were called forth by the four-hundredth anniversary of the beginning of that great movement. They furnish the first adequate biography in English of one of the most vigorous and interesting figures in the era of preparation, and the only available English translation of his principal writings. The thesis of these volumes, sustained alike in biography and translated works, is that Wessel Gansfort was in every sense of the term a precursor of the religious awakening of the sixteenth century. The first two-thirds of Volume I deals with the biography of Wessel and an estimate of the man. The remainder of Volume I, together with Volume II, is devoted to his chief works.

Many elements combined in the making of this remarkable man. From scholasticism came his love of exact definition, his passion for logical precision. From the mystic piety of an à Kempis and the schools of the Brethren of the Common Life came his deep religious enthusiasms. His humanistic interest and devotion to the sacred languages prepared the way for that interest in the Bible which characterized the Reformation age.

The decay of vital religion in the Netherlands and the corruption of the Renaissance papacy led him to deep searchings of heart and awakened in him a zeal for reform. His mind made up, he spoke it freely and forcibly, sustaining his positions by cold logic and the rapier thrusts of a keen intellect. "Master of Contradictions" he was called by his critics—a tribute indeed to his combative, argumentative spirit.

¹ *Wessel Gansfort, Life and Writings*. By Edward Waite Miller. Principal works translated by Jared Waterbury Scudder. New York: Putnam, 1917. 2 vols. xvi+333 and v+369 pages. \$4.00.